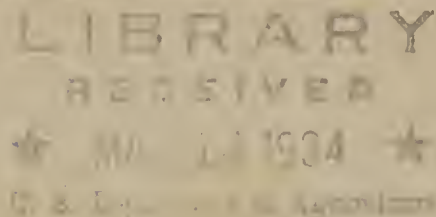


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THE GARDEN CALENDAR



A radio discussion by W. R. Beattie, Bureau of Plant Industry, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC radio stations, Tuesday, December 26, 1933.

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Hello folks. Well christmas is over and I hope it was a merry, merry christmas for all of you. We had a rather quiet christmas at our house and here's to you all a very happy New Year.

I dare say you do not care to hear about gardens and good things to eat on the day after christmas, and I'm sure I don't want to talk along that line so let's have something a little different today. I wonder if a number of you did not receive a nice blooming poinsettia, or a beautiful fern or palm for a christmas present, and naturally you are wondering how to care for it so that it will remain beautiful. My talk today is about house plants and how to care for them.

House plants are not so different from pet animals, dogs and cats especially and they require attention and I might add they respond in proportion to the attention they receive. Like to pet animals they must have proper food, water, pure air and be kept within a reasonable range of temperature. Like the animals they need plenty of sunshine and to be kept free from pests. Take the matter of pure air in the home. Many cases of plant failure are due to the presence of minute quantities of carbon monoxide, that deadly gas, in the air. In addition there may be other injurious elements in the air as a result of leaking gas fixtures, open joints or cracks in the hot-air furnace or from an oil or gas stove that is not provided with a vent pipe to carry the burned gasses into a chimney or to the outside of the house. I think that all things considered, the effect of gas on house-plants is most injurious of all.

The atmosphere of the average home is entirely too dry for most plants. This is especially true where the home is heated by means of a hot air furnace or by stoves. Steam heat is also very drying and the ideal is hot water heating. Where stoves are used to heat the home the air can be moistened by keeping a kettle of water on the stove and it is surprising how much water will evaporate from the kettle even though it does not boil but simply simmers on the stove. I wonder how many of you have sat and listened to the old teakettle singing away on the stove. Seems to me these modern teakettles don't sing like the oldfashioned iron ones we used to have. Anyway, when the teakettle sings on the stove it is sending moisture into the air along with its song. A pan of water on the radiator will answer the same purpose but it is not half so romantic as the singing teakettle.

Good soil for houseplants is very important and I have two or three requests from members of the Farm and Home Hour audience that I tell how to make good compost and how to prepare good soil for starting



plants. I am going to devote a whole garden calendar period to that subject in the near future. For the present let me suggest that a mixture consisting of one bushel of good garden loam, one half bushel of old and thoroughly rotted dairy barn compost and one-half bushel of sharp sand will be about right for most houseplants. From ferns and begonias you might add a little leafmold from the woods. A little bone meal say about a good handful may be added to this mixture.

Be careful about using sheep manure, poultry manure or any of the concentrated plant fertilizers on your houseplants, - they are strong and a very little goes a long ways. I can not give you any hard and fast rule about watering your houseplants. In the case of your dog or cat you place water where they can get it and they drink whenever they need water. Your plants have no choice in the matter and they have to take what you give them. When the air is dry and the plants are growing rapidly they require more water than when the air is moist, or the growth is slow. Lack of water will cause slow growth. The best rule is to give your plants a little water each and every day, increasing the amount when the weather is bright and giving less when the weather is dark and gloomy. Never under any circumstances allow water to stand in the saucers under the pots in which the plants are growing. Don't crowd your plants and give them all the sunshine possible.

Houseplants will stand considerable variation in temperature but most of them do best at a temperature just a trifle lower than that of the average living room. The majority of houseplants are not injured by a night temperature as low as 50 degrees. The poinsettia is an exception and if you chanced to get a beautiful poinsettia for christmas keep it at a temperature above 60 and preferable between 65 and 75 degrees. If you let a blooming poinsettia get badly chilled its leaves will turn yellow and fall off and it will also shed the colored bracts that surround the bloom. Later, when your poinsettia has finished blooming you can put it down cellar and let it rest for about three months without watering. In the extreme southern parts of the country poinsettias live outdoors the year round especially if they are protected during cold snaps. I will not have time to say anything about the insects and diseases of houseplants but let me suggest that you bathe the stems and foliage of your houseplants occasionally in tepid water to which a little mild soap has been added then rinse off with clear water. In closing my little indoor gardening talk today I want to again wish you one and all a very happy new year, and I'll be NBCing you in 1934.